

POSITIVE  
OUTCOMES  
SEPTEMBER 2020



# Introduction

The world has been spinning on an axis of uncertainty since March, a situation that most of us have not seen in our lifetime. Countless people have had their lives tipped upside-down, been forced to embrace a completely new approach to work and life and for too many, suffered the loss of loved ones.

Embracing this time like so many has not been easy, but at MCA, we actually have positive things to shout about! Since early March of this year, as the threats of Covid-19 were becoming a reality, we galvanised ourselves into action with an 'optimism-first' approach and this is what we have accomplished so far...

- We have recruited new staff to the global team
- Launched a new website - [www.murphycobb.com](http://www.murphycobb.com) - including our **MCA Live!** section for real-time updates
- Launched two new divisions - **MCA Technologies** and **Boundless** Executive Production (and one more to follow)
- Started an innovation webinar which swiftly turned into a **podcast** broadcast on all major platforms, attended by clients and industry suppliers
- Started a PR collaboration with **Little Black Book**
- Launched a joint venture to cover all territories for MCA in **Latin America**
- Hosted a webinar with the **Association of National Advertisers**
- Managed a **Global Digital Benchmarking** exercise

And finally...

- I and my family have moved to Lisbon in the midst of the last six months of chaos. My two children are in a great school, and we are all learning a new language on our big adventure.

**Enjoy the Unexpected Positive Outcomes of 2020 so far.**

Pat Murphy, Founder  
MurphyCobb



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# The Next Normal

It might seem strange to talk about the positive and unexpected benefits to come from the Covid-19 pandemic.

If anything, it has shown us how we, not only as a community but as a global industry, have adapted to overcome the challenges surrounding the pandemic.

## **The thirty-thousand-foot view:**

Yes, the last six months have been challenging. The waters are uncharted, but it's provided an opportunity to re-examine every aspect of production from a macro view.

More often than not, the behavioural changes in our way of working or indeed in life, are a force for good; they set the precedent for a more beneficial way of planning for the future. In the world of production, we know the ethos for tackling a challenge stems from innovation and resourcefulness.

## ***So why can Covid-19 be a positive experience in the world of production?***

For one, it has allowed us to take a more holistic view of production. How often do we get stuck in the granular details only to realise we gain better insight by taking a step back and viewing the whole picture? Similarly, why do we start a puzzle by joining the edges first?

Once you know the limits of the challenge, it makes the task of solving it feel much smaller.

There's also been a noticeable acceleration in the way we view and utilise technology in production. It's becoming common to hear the word 'remote' being used in aspects of production; whether it be directing, scouting locations, talent screening, production or post production.

Not only are we seeing new ways of incorporating technology into the production process but the direct benefits because of it.

Making the process safer, cheaper and more efficient also reduces the environmental impact usually caused by the transport of teams and equipment.



# Accelerated Change in Production

As with any major global event, we see a seismic shift in how we interpret the world around us, in the same way we adapt our way of working according to a brief. Covid-19 has accelerated and placed a magnifying glass on these ways of working.

Clients are moving towards an in-house or certainly a hybrid model of production, as during any period of uncertainty, the goal is to maximise control. With control, comes accuracy.

By minimising any external factors and integrating as much of the production process as possible with each project, clients can retain control over the quality and efficiency of their work. With that level of control, they also have accuracy of potential costs and revenue.

We have also seen a significant move towards decoupling production from the main creative and strategic partners.

Clients are seeking alternative ways to maximise their production budgets - going direct to production companies or working with independents (such as MCA Boundless) to manage their projects directly.

Not too long ago it was normal practice for a client's marketing strategy to have an Agency-Of-Record model. Which meant they had a single agency to work with and a designated point of contact for all their requirements.

Amid lockdown, however, agencies were being forced to adapt from their big budget concepts and traditional models of production.

Not surprisingly, some whose home countries were easing restrictions, attempted to return to the old ways of working, only to find that by denying the learning curve that others are adapting and growing into, they are intentionally putting themselves on the back foot of this race to survive.

The industry has been changing over the last few years and this change was amplified as the pandemic spread across the world.

The single agency approach was not necessarily agile or specialist enough for the increase in demand for digital media and the need for more and shorter form content imperative for the relationship with consumers.

This has created a myriad of specialised channels of engagement and for the majority of agencies, it was inefficient to undertake exclusively. Clients have had to adapt their model from an AOR structure to a project-based or multi-supplier model to keep up with demand from their consumers.

Finally, with more projects at a lower budget, this accelerated change means production has had to be supercharged to meet the clients' requirements whilst safeguarding the creative output.

# Better Planning

While much has been written about those who have failed at adapting and surviving during lockdown, we have been drawing our focus to those that are thriving rather than simply surviving the pandemic.

The situation has forced the industry to embrace change, showing the need for better planning and extension of time to complete a project; sometimes even twice as long.

This was to be expected as each country released their safety protocols to minimise the risk of exposure to the virus.

Again, some production companies believed these to be short term measures instead of embracing the change and adapting their ways of working for the long term.

We have become so accustomed to the 'Go, go, go!' mentality when it comes to production. Now we are having to intentionally slow down to a time frame that guarantees both the safety of the teams and the quality of work, which seems an impossible feat when the demand for consumer engagement is increasing.

One of the realities we have championed with our clients since MCA's inception is the need for contingency planning. We can no longer settle on a tried and tested process for a project in a market that is constantly evolving.

Brands need to scrutinise their competitive edge and see if they truly are getting the best return on investment.

We can help clients to ensure that their production process is planned effectively by reviewing agency agreements and confirming that the scope of work demonstrates a clear delegation of duties with a realistic timeline and workload.

More broadly, we can prioritise key objectives and set clear expectations. Whether it be the overall directive or a specific aspect of a deliverable, clarifying those points before it gets to the point where it will cost time, money or quality is paramount.



# The Elimination of Travel

Time appears to be the key factor when adapting to a new way of working.

***If production is taking longer but the demand is going up, then where is the time coming from?***

Since travel restrictions were imposed, we've come to realise the inordinate amount of time that is spent commuting around the globe for shoots or meetings.

Replacing the need to travel and using forms of technology for communication has made production efficient, cost effective and above all, safer for all involved.

For those who plan to stick to this new framework, the key lies in the foundation.

What does your technology infrastructure look like? Is it fit for purpose? How much control do you have? Where are your blind spots?

Remote shoots seem to be part of the next normal. A great example of this is in June 2020, while the majority of the world was in full lockdown, Vanity Fair published their monthly magazine with American singer Janelle Monáe on the cover.

The same editorial quality you'd expect from a studio shoot, with a photographer, lighting crew, stylists and wardrobe; was entirely achieved over a video call.

MCA had the opportunity to work on a 'contactless' production shoot as well. An equipment drop kit was delivered to the talent. They were assisted via video call with the crew from their respective homes and the project was delivered to the expectation of the client efficiently and safely.

With travel no longer being essential and integrating technology into production, this broadens the scope when sourcing directors, crew, talent and locations, as well as the ability for partners to attend shoots or meetings without the need to be there.

As reviews and approvals can be done remotely, time and travel costs cause less interference with the production schedule.



# Reallocating Budgets

## ***So, we know where our time is going, but what about the money?***

Well, quite simply, everything is being downsized. The demand for crews, cast and the number of locations or sets has been reduced.

This result is not only because of the restrictions in working but about how much can be accomplished with a small workforce.

Of course, this is difficult news to hear for many production companies, but the reality gives you the reason to question some decisions that contradict the traditional ways of working.

In the U.S, a typical day of production used to be 12 to 14 hours. Now with the necessity for safety measures and working restrictions, the typical working day has been reduced to 10 hours.

Our benchmarks are indicating that a minimum of 2 hours is focused on safety protocols.

With all that being said, a key rule to lead with is to abolish historical production cost estimates. They'll no longer be sufficiently accurate to determine future costs.

If the ways of working and focus on health protocols are adapting to change, so must the view on costs of production and the value it will deliver.

## ***How do you plan to redeploy those savings? What is your outlook for 2021?***

Yes, it may be an uncertain way to tackle an abstract and evolving situation like this pandemic. We need to take a broader view, outline the key priorities and lay the foundation for those future projects.



# Safety IS the Priority

This new situation has brought an underlining issue of safety in what is being discussed, whereas before it wasn't considered a top priority.

Given the nature of a shoot traditionally involving a group of people in a concentrated and fast paced environment for long periods, safety has now become an essential checklist when starting production.

The struggle we're seeing is the constant adaptation of this checklist coupled with the effective process needed to protect the partners involved.

Again, it's a directive that needs to be explicitly communicated by the client to set the dynamic for production to move forward with their best interests at the core of the process. With that comes the impacts on the creative approach, logistics and schedules.

The production budget needs to be revised to include these safety measures. It should be seen as a red flag if these aspects aren't being brought to the fore immediately, as they are likely to lead to unforeseen setbacks.

You'll be asking yourself, what if? What if the set becomes contaminated? What if the talent OR essential crew wake up the morning with a fever or symptoms of Covid? What is your plan B?

Forecasting your contingencies and implementing them as early on in the process as possible, will regulate some of these sporadic setbacks.



**MCA** 

# Review Your Options

With the move from an AOR model to a project model, clients have more options at their disposal and can take a more ubiquitous approach to their production. Rethinking the deliverables gives insight into the new potential return on investment.

During the pandemic, we've seen brands review their libraries of content and repurpose those assets to create new and relevant content.

We have seen a potentially irrevocable alternative to live action. With the advancements in technology and the capabilities of experienced operators, there is an abundance of options.

From a selfie-style influencer piece to computer-generated imagery, the agency needs to bring all of these options to the table when discussing deliverables.

An example of this was when we had the opportunity to be involved with a client working with a new agency and their live action shoot involving infants. It had been postponed halfway through due to the pandemic. Once measures had eased up enough to resume, despite the risk, the agency felt it acceptable to simply return to business as usual.

MCA went back to the client and illustrated all the realistic options for the shoot, leading to an honest review of the deliverables that involved the repurpose of stock footage and still imagery.

Overall, we'd managed to reduce the cost by more than half, minimised potential safety risks and showed the efficacy of having a contingency plan in place.

As another upside, global production has now become a viable option for clients. Without the considerations for travel, a client based in the U.K can attend an agency meeting in the U.S and a shoot in New Zealand, all in the same day. Granted, the real challenge is juggling the time zones!

The pandemic has only accelerated the integration of this way of working and with restrictions varying greatly around the world, it has allowed clients to be perpetually reviewing their options for production based on the level of restrictions imposed.

# Embracing Technology

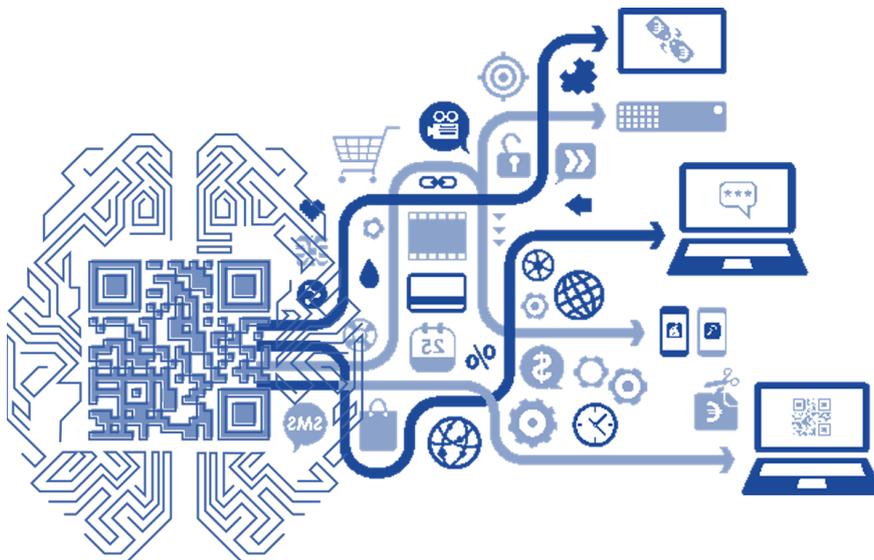
The commercial industry is using innovative production techniques usually found in movies or gaming and making them an option for clients to use.

We worked with the innovation department of a production company, Hogarth, on a virtual production and showcased to our client that we were able to achieve a big concept-style production with the use of a small crew, green screen and visual effects editing.

Similarly, the game engine, Unreal Engine has a library of CGI assets ranging from locations to objects and opens up the possibilities of what can be achieved on a small-scale production.

Whilst normally used for meetings and conference calls, video technology such as WhatsApp and Zoom, are increasingly being used for actual production viewings and approvals. The need to be in attendance at the shoots has lessened dramatically.

The level of creativity that can be accomplished with the use of technology has also shown the ability to renew the use old stock footage into a modern piece of content. Just look at Nike's commercial 'You can't stop us' for a great example of how you can take hours of stock footage, treat with some creative editing and deliver an impactful message.



# Good, Fast, Cheap & More...

The expression used to be *'Good, Fast, Cheap; pick two because you can't have all three'*.

Now you can have your cake, eat it and so much more. With the pandemic forcing a lot of us to work remotely, we are spending more time on multiple screens throughout the day. Both the viewership and the demand for fresh, customised and relevant content has never been higher.

- Clients are forced to rethink production to ensure they don't get lost amongst the noise and can still deliver impactful content.
- Better planning, reallocation of budgets, minimal travel and embracing technology, are just a few of the areas in which production companies are being forced to change for the good.
- Clients need to differentiate themselves over their competition and change their focus to **value** of their creativity vs **volume** of assets. Clients need more for their budget through planning, agility and innovation.

Overall, the reinvestment of savings back into production is driving an increase in the amount of usable content and delivering results with an unexpected and positive outcome.



# Authors' Biographies

## **Linda Tinoly**

Joining MCA in 2018, Linda's career spans over 20 years in every aspect of production and agency operations. She's successfully led organisations through transformation by ensuring the right structure; people and process are in place. She is a recognised leader in business affairs with expertise including SAG-AFTRA navigation, non-union buyouts, celebrity negotiations, music licensing, intellectual property rights, production tax incentives and creating a thoughtful strategic direction for each project. She puts all of those skills to use for MCA's clients to innovate production solutions.



## **Ian Maynard**

Ian has over 30 years' experience in advertising agency client service. He has worked at JWT on Unilever and PepsiCo, Publicis and Euro RSCG, where he led the Peugeot account, ran 18 global brands for Cadbury and was a key member of the Havas agency management team. He helped set up Hyundai's European in-house operation, Innocean, and worked client side as a member of Rolls-Royce Motor Cars Global Brand Team on the launch of the Phantom.

